

By Jack Prebles in Steubenville, Ohio
Herald Star:

Last week end Slugger Martin and myself made our winter pilgrimage into the mountains of West Virginia. While in Marlinton we heard a story that's a wow. It seems like the mountaineers in that section of Pocahontas county have been pestered with panthers, coyotes and other strange varmints, all raising havoc with the sheep, calves and deer. Then to top it all off the news got around from Webster Springs that some new fangled kind of a critter resembling a "blue-faced devil" was responsible for all these depredations. No one had ever seen this devil or observed his tracks.

The stock killing finally reached such proportions on one man's tract of land that he decided to organize all his friends and relations into a gigantic varmint drive. They met bright and early one morning at this man's home, bound dogs and all. As they were mapping their campaign and planning ways and means to combat this menace in the knee deep snow, the cabin door was suddenly flung open by a white-faced, almost breathless hunter who gasped, "Gosh, a-mighty, kinfolks, grab yore shootin' arns for the devil hisself's jest left tracks acrost the pasture lot!"

No time was lost in assembling and turning loose the assorted cat and bear dogs. Fresh shells were thrown into the various firearms and out into the deep snow they floundered. The chase was on! They soon reached the old pasture lot and found the tracks of the varmint clearly outlined in the snow. We were told they were at least fourteen inches wide and about twenty inches long, that they were oval in shape and had the stride of a six foot man. No amateur hunters, these mountaineers. The could also guess pound for pound the varmin's size. Fearless, undaunted, they commenced to trail this unknown creature. Much trouble was experienced with the bound dogs, usually expert trailers. They seemed lifeless listless and disinterested. This was attributed to their disinclination to tangle with a "devil" in mortal combat. Others said they were useless trackers in any kind of snow. Nevertheless, on they went.

Up the mountain side and across the glades through tangled thickets of spruce and laurel and down and up another mountain side. This tracking kept up for over six hours. Finally the gigantic tracks grew freer and plainer, the hunters more and more excited. Only a matter of a few minutes now until they should sight the monster devil. Again and again the firearms were inspected and the tired dogs urged on to greater efforts who were by now practically swimming in the deep snow.

Then a blistering discussion arose as to who in the party should receive the lion's and most of the credit but this seemed to be nothing but a staffing off of the critical moment when

they should engage the devil. Soon they broke through a clump of balsam fir and saw far ahead the shuffling figure of the varmint. With a final burst of speed they closed in on this figure and discovered to their disgust and disappointment it was nothing but the local game warden trying out for the first time his new mail order bear paw showshoes.

The hunters were so shame faced they tried to hush the story up and no paper in that part of the state would print a word of it. As we do not expect to be back in that part of the world until trout season opens I feel free to write it. Maybe it will all blow over when I return. At least I hope so for those fellows are crack shots with their "shootin' arns"

The recent winter's extreme cold and deep snow has been a marvel to the southern mountaineers. For the first time in many a year the game wardens and forest rangers have used snow shoes and skis to navigate the forests. I have no idea what a mountaineer would mistake a ski track for. Possibly think he was on the trail of a snow snake or something.

We also heard a good story from the lips of G. D. McNeill, superintendent of schools in Marlinton. Mr. McNeill is a gentleman of the old school with a delicious sense of humor and author of "Camp Fires on Happy Rivers." His daughter, Louise McNeill, is the author of "Gauley Mountain." Mr. McNeill told me about the city fellow that came into the mountains last fall to hunt grouse and woodcock. He borrowed an excellent bird dog from a mountaineer friend and started out all alone. He was warned against getting lost in the woods but paid his advisors scant attention. Late in the day toward dusk, the city fellow attempted to find his way back to the cabin. He was hopelessly lost.

After floundering around for several hours and getting no place he decided to make a night of it in a nest of leaves and make another try for civilization in the morning. Calling the faithful dog over to him for companionship and safe keeping the hunter twisted the dog's chain securely into his vest for an anchor and then composed himself for an unbroken night's sleep.

He awakened in the morning to find the dog gone—and stranger still, his heavy knitted underwear had vanished from underneath his fully clothed body. But a shriveled piece of cord still remained attached to his vest button. Gathering in this twisted cord the hunter proceeded to follow it.

For over three miles he tracked the thread and reeled it in. And, believe it or not, this thread was his own underwear that had been snagged by a projecting iron silver on the dog chain. It led him directly back to the mountain cabin he had left the morning before. The other end of the reeled out underwear was still attached to the bird dog when they called him out from under the cabin. Wonderful are the things one finds in Nature and West Virginia.

"BUDFORDS"

Dear Editor:

7-6-38

I have noticed from your columns the last few months that you have a pretty good stock of what Lowell Thomas would call "tall stories."

I wonder if you know that the Greenbrier country produced the original "tall story" teller long before Pocahontas County was born. My grandfather, Enoch Ewing, born and bred on Swago Creek, and 11 years of age when his father, William, moved to Ohio in 1810, used to chuckle over a line of what he called "Budfords."

One was about a pioneer hunter, who discovered six owls sitting in a row upon the limb of a tree. The hunter, in order to get a better position where he could pick off one at a time, observed as he moved around, the faces of the owls followed him. He made a complete circle and the owls kept their faces toward him all the way around. A happy thought struck him that if he kept on going around the circle, the owls would twist their heads off. At the completion of the second trip around, their heads dropped off, and the hunter had six birds without firing a shot.

The other one I recall was about a pioneer who was out in the woods splitting rails. The log was large and tough. Just as he was entering a wedge, he was surprised by the appearance of four Indians. The Indians pretended to be friendly, but the rail splitter was dubious. The Indians, he noticed, were very much interested in the process of rail splitting and looked on with much concern. The pioneer was fairly caught,

2-29-40 TALL TALES P.T.

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